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LITTLE DICK'S SON



KATE
GANNETT
WELLS



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"THERE WAS NOTHING IN IT EXCEPT SOME SILVER COIN
AND A PAPER." Page 75.



LITTLE DICK'S SON



BY
KATE
GANNETT
WELLS

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LITTLE DICK'S SON

BY

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Mrs. Catherine Booth, (Gannett)



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LITTLE DICK'S SON.

I.

WHAT HAPPENED AND HOW.

"I KNOW something is going to happen to-morrow," said Peter, aged eight, to Dick, aged four. "Mama is so queer, and a long, narrow basket has come with nothing in it."

"Promise not to tell," whispered little Dick, "and I'll tell you — it is something they are going to do to me, and you mustn't let 'em."

"How do you know?"

"'Cause folks shouldn't whisper so loud. I know what I'm going to do — I'm going to run away. You take good care of everybody, 'cause they won't never see me again!"

Peter was awed, though he stoutly declared, "I don't believe you know how to run away." Then he went whistling out of the room to conceal his fright. But whatever was going to be done, he must prevent it.

Peter's own little room was cold; yet it com-

manded a view of the back-yard, and in it he also could hear the front door-bell ring. So he made up his mind to stay there, and watch and listen. As for anything happening to his little brother Dick without his leave, no one need expect that for a moment.

However, he soon grew tired of just watching and listening, and decided to count once more the duplicates in his collection of stamps. He could do that and keep on the lookout at the same time. Thus it was, how Peter never rightly could tell, that he neither knew the front door-bell had rung nor that the back-gate had shut, and was startled when he heard his mother's voice calling Dick. At once he was sure his little brother had run away, just by the sound of the word. He felt frightened, but he went down-stairs, asking, "What's the matter?" in a careless manner.

"You there Peter?" exclaimed his mother. "Then where's Dick? We can't find him."

"Perhaps he's in the vacant lot — I'll go and see," answered Peter, making for the door.

But little Dick was neither there nor in the Public Garden, and the policeman had not seen him, and nobody on the street had seen him. Then all was alarm and confusion in the house, and Peter was so ashamed of his own lack of watchfulness that he still kept Dick's secret.

As it grew darker it was discovered that the

dog Punky had not come home for supper. Where was he? With Dick? To lose both dog and brother was more than Peter could endure; and he suddenly chokingly blurted out, "It is all your fault, Mama, 'cause Dick said that you were going to do something to him and that he'd run away before he'd let you!"

Mrs. Bell turned very white, but said nothing. That was Mrs. Bell's way of doing when she would like to say a great deal. And now Peter was more afraid than ever. He had told little Dick's secret. He had not kept watch himself, and had scared his mother. Because he did not know what else to do, he went out of the house again to hunt for Dick. Thus when Mr. Bell came home he had to go out at once and search for two boys.

It was fully eight o'clock when the bell rang and rang, and Peter's voice was heard outside. Then how every one came running into the front entry from up-stairs and down-stairs!

"Come quick, out into the back-yard!" called Peter; and followed by them all he rushed through the hall, down the back-stairs, out into the yard, and there in the dog-kennel, sound asleep, were Dick and Punky.

"How did you find them?" asked the newspaper reporter, who had heard of the trouble and was on the spot writing it up.

"I didn't find them — I just suddenly knowed he'd be in the kennel," said Peter.

Then explanations followed, and the policeman did not seem to like it at all because the scare had turned out such a tame affair ; but the newspaper reporter thought it so funny that he wrote it all out, with big head-lines, and everybody in the city of Boston knew the next morning that little Dick Bell, four years old, had started to run away because he was afraid something was going to happen to him, and that he went out of the back-yard when no one saw him and wandered about, wondering where to go. He did not go far because he grew very lame; and as the back-gate was ajar and he was very unhappy, he let himself in again, and crept into the dog-kennel, where the family dog had found him, and there he had cried himself to sleep. And the funniest part of it was, that when they did find him he forgot to ask what was going to happen.

Yet it did happen just the same.

The next morning his mother petted him more than usual ; and he had an extra nice breakfast, and was playing about in the dining-room when the Doctor came in and told him he wanted to look at his leg more carefully than he ever had done.

Dick did not mind that, as the Doctor was a jolly man, and he was used to having his leg looked at. And then his Uncle John came in ; and while Dick was lying flat on his back his uncle amused him by dropping bits of candy

into his mouth and telling him jokes, so that Dick never thought about what the Doctor was doing till it was all done.

But when Dick tried to get up and couldn't, he found that a long piece of wood had been strapped on to his left leg, from his hip to his ankle. Then he screamed and scolded, and said it wasn't fair; and Mrs. Bell, too, said that it wasn't fair, and that if she had a hundred lame children she would never do the same way again, but tell beforehand.

"No, Madam, you wouldn't," the Doctor answered her, "not if I had the care of those hundred children. Dick would have been in a high fever if he had known 'beforehand,' while now he'll soon get over his rage and"—

At that instant in came a lady with a Berne toy-bear; and in winding it up and seeing it dance, Dick forgot about the splint. His uncle told him more stories, and soon it was dinner-time, when it was so droll to be fed lying down that he really began to feel better than he had for weeks, as the poor inflamed little hip and leg were having a chance to rest.

By and by his mother explained it all to him; and then the long, narrow basket with its mattress was brought in, and he was lifted into it and carried up-stairs, and went to sleep as happy as a little boy can be who has more persons to wait on him than he knows how to employ.

But Peter waited around till the Doctor came

again at night ; and then he went up to him, and with hands in trousers pockets spoke to him, just as a soldier should *not* speak to a general :

“ You didn’t do fair. You should have told Dick. I don’t like you ! ”

II.

“MY SON.”

FOR weeks and months little Dick lay in his basket. He was carried in it up and down stairs at every meal, and to visit in different rooms with his mother and baby sister. He was even carried in it outdoors; for his father made a truck, on which the basket exactly fitted, and in this way Dick could go about with the rest of the children.

One of his favorite plays was Station Master. In this play he had the charge of real and make-believe bundles, which the other boys carried round on their bicycles and left at people's doorsteps. The game kept him quiet, and the others liked it too, and joined in with a will; but sometimes, when they were gone too long on their delivery errands, Dick grew cross, and would toss his well leg up and down and almost over the basket's edge, for there was no fun in being left alone with no one to boss.

Then he had a birthday while he was in the basket; and so many presents were given him that he put half of them aside for the next birthday, when, as he would be well, he could

not expect so many. That night little Dick prayed, "Please don't let me be five so long as I was four, and let me be six only one month, and seven only one month — then perhaps I can catch up even with the other boys!"

Best of all his good times was the daily hour after supper, when he and his mother and Peter and the baby sister were in the nursery, and played games until it was time to go to bed. Then Mrs. Bell gave the last tucking in of the sheets and the last words herself.

On one of those evenings, little Dick said to her, looking up from the basket, "Mama, why don't you ask me why I wanted to run away?"

"Because I know you will tell me when you are ready," said his mother.

"Well, I'm ready — and I don't know. I think it was real mean in me to scare you so, mama, just 'cause I guessed something was going to happen to me. I won't never do it again when I get well, and I *can't* do it now, you know — so don't ever worry any more! I'm *never* going to run away. I just thought I'd go a little way so the Doctor couldn't find me. And my son told me I was doing naughty and must go right home, and I turned right back; and my son told me to go into Punky's house, and think it all out and see how naughty I was. And 'fore I got done thinking, I went to sleep."

"Your 'son' is the best part of you, Dicky," said his mother with a smile. "You had better always mind him. But mama's name for him is different from yours."

"He is my son," objected Dick with emphasis, "my onty donty son, just as I am yours. And he wants things just as I do."

"Does he get them, Dick?"

"You don't quite understand, mama — I mean the things *he* wants are things he wants me to do, and things he wants me not to do. Won't you tell if I tell you?"

"Never, Dicky."

"Well, mama, he tells me when I am naughty the things to do to get good again — and I'd rather talk with him about it, when I have done a naughty thing, than with anybody else. I'm going to talk with him now about some things — good-night, mama," and he kissed her as she bent close.

For some time after she left him, Mrs. Bell heard her little boy talking to his "son." The tones were very low, but sounded precisely as though two persons were conversing together.

Little Dick's "son" was the invisible fifth member of Mrs. Bell's family. Dick had always had him — how or why none of them ever knew. Sometimes the little boy would not sit down to table unless a chair was placed beside him for his "son;" and oftentimes when alone, as his mother knew, he held long converse with him. What a doll is to a girl, this "son"

appeared to be to little Dick — yet still much more than a playmate — a protector also, and a monitor. For the last year the child had been lame ; and sometimes for an hour together Mrs. Bell would hear the sound of the little limping steps and the busy, earnest tones of his voice, mingling together, until she hardly knew whether she were most amused or sad.

At last, after a great while, the boy in the long basket began to say, “ Won’t it be nice when I can run about ? ”

The weeks of the imprisonment, however, were nearly over, for one day the Doctor came and took off the splint, and little Dick stood up for a few seconds. The next day he stood for a whole minute, though it was fully four weeks before he could walk with ease ; but he seemed to have great fun in the learning to step again, and in talking it over with his “ son.” His mother often heard him pacing with uneven tread, chatting away cheerily.

Sometimes he wrote letters to his “ son,” and dropped them into the letter-box, which was close to the house, though he was never known to stamp them. The postman discovered that it was Dick who wrote them, and after that brought them back to Mrs. Bell. They were always short. One of them read : “ Dick Bell is going to be good all the time. Are you happy ? ”

But when, one day, Dick saw one of his notes in his mother’s hands he was indignant.

"I wrote it just for my son!" he said, "and I know he didn't show it to you, mama!"

Very patiently Mrs. Bell tried to explain to the little boy what it meant to mail a letter. But again he said as he had before, "Mama, you don't understand; I want to tell my 'son' things. Sometimes I tell him just by thinking, and sometimes when I want to be sure to remember, myself, I write them down—he knows all about why!"

"But he can't get it out of the mail, Dicky," said Mrs. Bell, scarcely knowing what it was best to say to him.

"You make me tired, mama; you can't understand." And he drew such a long sigh that Mrs. Bell wished she had not spoken to him of the letters; this one she hid in the secret drawer of her desk. Dick never wrote another note to his "son."

There was one person who was very much afraid of "Dick's son," and that was Peter. Peter always objected to ideas he could not understand and things he could not see. His specialty was a cobbler whom he had undertaken to befriend through life.

The cobbler lived near the back-yard of Peter's house, and the acquaintance began by Peter's listening to the man's whistling while he was at work. Mrs. Bell's maid took her boots there to be mended, and had got him the "repairs" of the family, for she expected some day to marry the cobbler, and take care of his

motherless little girl. To this Peter objected, and interfered all he could; he had an idea that the maid was extravagant, and that it would be a bad plan for the cobbler.

Moreover, Peter had a strong notion that molasses, ginger, and water, which he put up in little bottles, was better for the cobbler than real beer, and for this reason, too, often visited him. The cobbler at first was amused, then provoked; and finally, to get rid of taking or pretending to take Peter's beverage, promised the boy he would not drink any real beer — and he kept his promise.

The difference between Peter's cobbler and Dick's "son" was that Peter had to watch over the grown-up man, and that the "son" took care of the little boy; but both cobbler and son were helping the boys to grow into resolute men.

III.

PETER'S BOOTS.

PETER was a philanthropist, who wanted to make those whom he wished to assist do precisely as he planned for them. Dick was a poet, who wanted to be let alone, and knew that everything would come right in the end, and loved to sit by himself.

Besides the cobbler, Peter had undertaken the charge of the cobbler's little girl, and had decided to see that she had an education. He scolded her till she cried whenever he knew of her being absent from school.

In the hurry and worry of getting ready for Christmas, Peter had not seen his cobbler for two days, when at dusk one evening he ran out of the yard, into the back alley and round to the shop. It was closed. Its single gas jet was not burning. Peter knew the side-entrance to the room above, where the man and his child lived; and he stumbled up the stairs in the dark, pushed open the door without knocking, and found the little girl on her knees before the stove, just putting into it her doll. She was crying as if her heart would break. By the stove lay a doll's broken furniture set,

a crippled Noah's ark, and a disabled backgammon board.

"What are you up to?" exclaimed Peter severely.

"Daddy's sick and cold, and he hasn't got any shoes to mend, and he hasn't got any money, and no wood, and he's so hungry; and if he gets warm p'r'aps he won't be so hungry, and so I—oh, dolly, you darling!—there, burn up quick!" And she pushed the legs of the doll into the stove, where its head already was burning, and threw herself in a heap on the floor, her little thin frame shaking with sobs.

Peter looked at her like a judge, walked over to the bed, pulled down the worn quilt, put his hand on the sick man's head, and felt his pulse as if he were a doctor. Then he went back to the little girl, and sitting down on the floor by her, took off his boots and threw them into the fire.

This being done he strode back to the bed, and said, "You must get well. I haven't any boots—you've got to make me a pair right off!"

The cobbler sat straight up in bed. The little girl also sat up, but only to throw her Noah's ark into the stove, for the feeble flame made by the doll had gone out and the boots had not yet blazed up. Peter's feet began to feel cold, and he stood stamping to make them warm.

The cobbler was not too sick to understand the heroism of his child, or Peter's plan for helping him; but it all made him sicker, and he fell back, dead or faint. As the little girl threw in the rest of her playthings she saw by the firelight the whiteness of her father's face. Peter, more thoroughly frightened than when Dick was lost, ran home in his stockings, and tried to insist on the maid going over to the shop — at the same time teasing her to promise that she would not stay and marry the cobbler. "You wouldn't make anything by it," the boy argued, "'cause he hasn't got anything to leave but his little girl, and I'm going to take care of her."

The maid complained that Master Peter was impertinent, and it ended in Peter's mother returning with him. She soon set matters right. But not until after she had procured coal and wood, and bread and soup, and made the cobbler comfortable, who after all only had a severe cold and was very hungry, did Mrs. Bell notice that Peter was without his boots.

"You —" she began; but the cobbler's little girl, fearing that her protector was to be blamed, ran in front of the boy, and between cries and shivers told how Peter had burnt up his boots to make some work for her father.

"It wasn't half so hard," interrupted Peter, "as for her to burn her doll and playthings to get him warm, and the boots were mine just as much as her things were hers."

"Who gave the boots to you?" asked Mrs. Bell, trying to be stern.

"They were given, any way, so they were mine," maintained Peter; but his mother took him home and sent him to bed. She gave him hot peppermint, and put a mustard plaster to his feet, until he wished he had never burnt his boots. However, he was all right the next morning. Sometime during the day he wrote in his diary:

"Burnt my boots. Perhaps it was silly, and perhaps it wasn't. It's done now. Sha'n't do so next time."

Peter's philanthropy took a more practical turn after Christmas. He had had what he called a "perfectly horrid Christmas" — lots of things he did not want. His little brother had had a beautiful day — everything he wanted and a great deal more besides. So Peter proposed they should set up a "rummage counter" in the cobbler's shop, and sell out what they did not want, and with the proceeds buy a hat for the cobbler's little girl. He said this would be much better than to keep over their gifts till next Christmas, then mend them up and send them to the Children's Hospital.

"I don't want to give away what's just been given to me," urged little Dick; "it isn't Christmas-y."

"But you want Nora to have a new hat?" answered Peter.

"Perhaps I do, but I'm not sure I want her

to have it that way," said Dick. "I'll ask my son."

"Bother your 'son!' decide now — right off!" commanded Peter.

Little Dick got up, and walked lame out of the room — a trick, or unconscious manner, which he had adopted when any one spoke disrespectfully of his "son," and which always made the speaker wish he had not said anything.

Peter sat still, whistled and whittled — his resort when affairs did not go to his liking.

Pretty soon Dick came walking back straight as a soldier, and held out his Christmas money to Peter.

"You can have all that," he said, "and buy things for the store. I do want Nora to have a hat, but my son doesn't want me to give any things folks have just given me. He says it doesn't seem grateful."

Peter counted the money before he spoke. It was two dollars in all. "Why, that will buy her a hat without having a store!" said he, in rather a disappointed tone.

Dick stood and looked at Peter with wide-open eyes as he counted it again. "You can have it," repeated the little fellow, and walked away.

Something had gone wrong with little Dick. He could not ask his "son" about it, for that would not be loyal to Peter. He was sure he had done right in giving away the money — that

had been given him to do with as he pleased. Yes, the puzzle was about Peter — about Peter's words.

At last Dick said to his "son," "I won't think about it. Peter has got his 'ways,' that's all; it will all come out right."

IV.

PETER'S RUMMAGE SALE.

PETER was a boy who did not like to be thwarted. He had planned for a store in the way he thought best; and Dick had chosen to interfere, or rather his "son" had done so — and whenever he quoted *him* Dick always remained perfectly stubborn!

A "rummage sale" was a sensible thing. You rummaged among your possessions, and got out whatever you didn't wish to keep, and held a sale, and people who did want them came and bought them. Dick's room and his were full of such things. He resolved to have the store anyway, and buy Nora a hat, exactly as he first planned; and with Dick's two dollars he would work out another scheme, and that, too, should be for the benefit of Nora.

He had just got to "interest" in arithmetic, and as yet he cared little for knowledge that could not immediately be put to use. So he had tried to invent plans to test the advantages of interest. And now it had occurred to him to set up a bank in connection with the rummage store, and loan out his little brother's money in small sums at a very low rate of

interest, to be computed on each ten cents, rather than on a dollar basis !

Peter was so sure the idea would "take" that he decided to consult his teacher and ask her aid in his calculations.

"Are you sure your mother would like the plan?" inquired Miss Lewis.

"My mother knows everything without seeming to," replied Peter; "and she lets us boys go ahead, and doesn't interfere if she feels that things are going to come out right. Of course we never plan on purpose to keep anything from her!"

As Miss Lewis knew Mrs. Bell was a very wise woman, she showed Peter how to open a set of accounts, and to prepare cards to be given to those who borrowed money at interest. Therefore she was not surprised in walking down Eliot Street, a few days later, to see a sign in the cobbler's window (for he had recovered and was doing a thriving business), with this lettering:

Christmas Left-Overs.

Money to Loan. Interest Low.

Inside the shop she found Peter's little brother and Nora as salespeople, Peter as banker, and

quite a crowd of persons as customers ; for as the boy's plan had become known he had received several contributions for his rummage sale. Broken toys he returned with scant politeness, and the advice that they be given to hospitals as they were not good enough for business purposes. There really was such a number of people that a policeman halted by the door, and Dick was glad to turn to his mother for aid, so brisk were the sales. How his mother came to be there, little Dick hardly knew, except on the general principle that she was always where she was most wanted. He guessed she must have sent some of the articles which were quickly sold, like children's dresses and cups and saucers.

Then there came a great temptation to Peter, the banker.

So many children wanted to borrow a few cents and pay interest, that he saw his gains would be considerable, and that if he had a larger sum he could loan it all — and thus make more money for Nora. But would it be right for him to borrow money of somebody, loan it out, and trust to repayment by the borrowers to make it good again ?

Peter never thought of such a plan until Dick's two dollars were almost gone. He had no money of his own with him. He could not leave to go home to get it, and he was also far from sure that he wished to run any risk with his Christmas cash. It was different with his

little brother's money. Dick had given it for Nora.

Then he went on to reason further, that if he would not risk his own money ought he to risk any other person's money — especially as something might happen to his own money? It might be burnt up or stolen, and then he would not have a cent left to repay what he had borrowed, in case the persons borrowing did not pay him back!

It was dreadful to have to decide so quickly! Peter wanted to think it out while whittling, but he couldn't. Peter could always think more clearly if he was whittling. But he was so busy making loans that there was no chance to stop and whittle for even a moment. And now the last five cents of Dick's money was gone; and Tim Jones stood in front of him, asking to borrow ten cents at the rate of one cent interest a week, for a month. Peter grew hot and cold, dizzy and confused.

"Make haste!" called Tim; "don't you see there's a string of fellows behind me?"

Up shouted Peter in a loud voice:

"Bank is closed! Principal is all loaned! Will open next month with larger capital!"

Peter's ideas grew clearer as he shouted, though there was a general laugh at the announcement. But he could laugh too as he whistled in his great rejoicing that he had not borrowed himself into debt; and his mother looked so happy, that it suddenly occurred to

him, that perhaps the way he was feeling was the way Dick felt when his "son" had been talking to him.

Meanwhile Nora and Dick had had lots of fun, insisting that there were no marked-down goods, and that all sales were for cash. Peter's Christmas toys had been rated high in a half hope that they would not all be sold. Yet they were; and the rummage articles which Mrs. Bell, Miss Lewis, and the neighbors generally had contributed brought good prices that continued until the last paper doll and tin soldier had been sold. Enough was cleared to buy Nora both a hat and coat, and the cobbler had received so many orders for patching that it was just as jolly a time as a jolly Christmas.

During the sale Dick had become well acquainted with Nora. He decided that she was very nice for a little girl who did not like poetry, though he hoped that Peter had never spoken to her about his "son." With her father he formed a lasting friendship that day. For the cobbler had a dreamy nature; and when he told Dick that as often as he shut his eyes he could see beautiful things, the little boy knew what was meant as he looked round the man's bare dingy little shop.

But best of all the "something" that had lain between him and Peter since the first proposal for the sale, had vanished. Both boys knew it as they went home, and in the alleyway slid their hands into each other's.

"I *didn't do* something," whispered Peter to his mother as she kissed him good night. "I wanted to — but I didn't. I don't want to tell you what it was, but I guess you know. It's queer, mama, how there are two Peters; are there two everybody's?"

"Yes, dear, until one has conquered the other for all time," answered Mrs. Bell.

"How *does* she know everything a fellow does or thinks?" wondered Peter as she went out.

V.

A SECRET SOCIETY.

TIME went on very quietly for a long while after the boys closed out their rummage store. There didn't seem any need of holding another sale, as Nora appeared to have plenty of comfortable clothing, nor of starting a new bank. All the money which had been loaned had been returned ; and at little Dick's wish both the principal and interest had been put into the savings bank for Nora. In fact, it was now Dick who looked out for Nora, while Peter considered himself the adviser of both. And certainly it was the faith of the two young Bell boys in the cobbler's good intentions that kept the man steady and industrious.

Dick was well now, and in school. Both he and Peter felt that they had grown old fast since Christmas. Peter had been promoted, and was a seventh-grade boy. Little Dick was in the fourth grade and doing well.

Suddenly, just after the Easter holiday, Peter had a new plan that made a good deal of trouble for himself and for Dick.

He began to believe in "secret societies," and in the seventh and eighth grade grammar boys initiating the third and fourth grade boys into their mysteries. He resolved to have one. The initiation was to be nothing cruel—a very different process from "hazing"—much more like the doings of Free Masons, he imagined. He asked his father many leading questions, and became more and more puzzled about right forms of initiation for secret societies. At last he took into his confidence an eighth-grade boy, Bob Lawton.

First they swore each other to secrecy on a hot poker—the scar that would be left on the back of the wrist to serve as a reminder of loyalty to the Society. They next arranged a hand-grip—an interlocking of thumbs, which might lead to dislocation of the thumb joint if not properly managed.

Then came the difficult matter of how and of when to conduct the initiation of new members.

Bob had visions of partial duckings in horse-troughs, of marking a skull-and-cross-bones on the forearms of the little fellows, and of taking away their credits at the peanut stands. Peter objected to such proceedings as too public and also as too imitative of the doings of older boys—students in college, say. He wanted something original but not at all frightening; something which should hurt some, and yet be a joke; and above all, something to which a

policeman could not object in case he should find it out.

"Let's make the police think the boys have broken their legs, ring up an ambulance, and send 'em off to the hospital," proposed Bob, as a compromise to his first plan.

"The Mayor would be after us if we tried fooling with the ambulances," answered Peter.

"No, he wouldn't; my father is in the Common Council, and he wouldn't let the Mayor have any money to make a fuss with."

"I'd rather do something different," urged Peter, striving to think of something his mother might not strongly disapprove. "I had thought of making 'em eat molasses corn-balls till they got disgusted, or of treating us seventh-grade boys to ice-cream soda, or of giving us trolley-rides and candy till they hadn't any change left."

Bob cordially approved of Peter's plan.

"Don't take in more than one or two fellows at a time," said he. "Begin with just your brother. Let me know when all is ready, and I'll fix him myself." Then the school-gong sounded, and both boys went to their seats in the class-room.

"Attention!" twice called the teacher. Peter, who did not seem to hear, sent a splash of ink from his ink-well over his desk. She caught hold of his hand to stop him. "What are you doing?"

"Thinking," said Peter, looking up.

"Take out your paper, write down what you are thinking about, and bring it to me," she directed.

Some of the pupils almost laughed aloud. It was droll to have anything going wrong with Peter Bell, almost the best boy in the school.

Peter roused up, and wrote and figured till it was time for the next recitation ; and on leaving the room at the end of the session, handed in his work to the teacher, as usual, and went off with Bob Lawton.

Miss Lewis took home Peter's sheet with others to correct, and found it a strange mingling of two words — "molasses," "corn-balls" — with sums in multiplication.

"Peter's always getting up schemes — I'll just watch him and see," she reflected, and said nothing. She met him the next day as if she did not suspect anything was wrong, while he had never a thought that he had written something which was not connected with his lessons.

The fact was that Peter was greatly troubled. Bob Lawton had insisted that it was always proper to try experiments on one's own family first, therefore, Dick must be initiated before any other boy was elected to membership. Peter argued that experiments should begin on boys whom one did not like ; anyway, he objected to anything being done to his little brother Dick.

"He has lots of cash, for one thing," argued Bob in his turn ; for since the affair of the bank

little Dick Bell had acquired the reputation of being a boy-millionaire.

Peter thought of Dick's long illness, and of his "son," and declared he'd give up the whole thing before his brother should be made sick by eating corn-balls, or should spend his allowance treating big boys. Thereupon Bob pointed to the wee scar on Peter's wrist, and he at once felt himself mysteriously obliged to be silent.

Bob Lawton waited some days. When he thought Peter must have forgotten all about the Society, he came up to Dick as he left the yard at the end of a school-day and proposed they should have a trolley-ride. Dick looked at the clock, and consented if he could be home in time for dinner. "You'll pay for me?" said Bob persuasively, as they entered the car, and Dick assented, really proud at being so honored by an eighth-grade fellow.

The ride was short; for this part of the "initiation" having worked well, Bob was eager to try the effect of corn-balls on the new member, and of soda ice-cream on himself. So they turned back, and went into a small shop, such as little Dick Bell had never before entered.

"Now," said Bob, not quite so persuasively, "you buy me soda ice-cream, and molasses balls for yourself, till you have not got any money left! Turn out your pockets; let's see the inside!"

Dick stared at Bob, but obeyed. He could

not find more than fifteen cents, which seemed to be a very big disappointment to the eighth-grade boy. Bob had calculated on two ice-cream sodas for himself and five balls for Dick — whereas one ball could not make any kind of a fellow sick.

Here Dick's "son" began to whisper; and though the little boy paid for the soda and the ball he would not touch the latter.

"You must!" declared Bob. "You can't get elected into Peter's and my Secret Society if you don't eat it!" He tried to push it into Dick's mouth, but only succeeded in smearing his face. "Eat it!" commanded Bob, thrusting it forward again, seizing the ball so hard that it crumbled. "Eat it!"

"Don't you eat it," whispered Dick's "son," loud enough this time for Dick to hear him.

The man behind the counter did not interfere; and again Bob tried force, when there came on his hand a big blow which drove the soda glass that he was still holding, down on the floor, broken to pieces.

Then the man came round to see what had happened, and found Peter calling Bob to account and telling Dick to run home fast. Dick would not leave the place; and the man said that Peter must pay for the glass, as he was the one who had caused the trouble; else he would have all three boys arrested.

Peter said he would pay just as soon as he and Bob could "swear off."

“ Rub your scar upon mine, and the Society is broken up and won’t never be again ! ” cried Peter, with a disdainful glare at Bob.

The two boys touched wrists back to back, saying together,

“ What never has been
Never can be.”

Then Peter meekly paid for the broken glass, as the man still had his hand on his shoulder, while Bob ran out unseen by all excepting Dick, who made way for him.

The two brothers walked home.

“ You see,” explained Peter, as they went along, “ Bob hasn’t any experience or good judgment. He and I wanted to form a Secret Society of you fourth-grade boys, and he wanted to begin with you, and insisted on it; and I objected because you are my family. And when one of the fellows told me he’d seen you and Bob get into a trolley, I just took the next one and have been chasing you ever since till I got you here. See? Why didn’t you eat that corn-ball? Then we could have had our Society all right! It wouldn’t have hurt you.”

Dick did not answer. The little fellow had grown shy about speaking of his “ son ” as he had grown older, though he believed in him and relied on him just as much as ever.

“ Speak, can’t you, when I have taken such a lot of trouble about you ! ” insisted Peter.

“ Because Bob had no right to take me into

a strange store, and my son told me mama wouldn't like it if I touched anything," answered Dick, gaining courage as he spoke.

That was all that was ever said between the brothers on the subject of Secret Societies. It was a good many days before Peter and Bob spoke to each other at all, and by that time Peter had lost his interest in the idea.

At the end of term-time, when the teacher returned the boys' sheets she asked Peter what one of his papers meant. At first, as he looked at it, he could not understand it himself. But when at last he recollected, he told her frankly that he didn't want to tell her for he came near getting into mischief, but didn't; and since he knew that he had been very silly — wouldn't she just trust him for the future?

This the teacher would have done without the request, for she knew Peter Bell was at bottom a good boy.

VI.

THE HURDY-GURDY IN THE PARK.

As the brothers grew older, they began to bring their little sister Ruth into their comradeship. Both boys were very proud of her, though they took her as a matter of course. Peter had a dim notion that she was to him what Dick's son was to his brother. At any rate, when Peter found himself regarded by Ruth as a perpetual hero and infallible, he felt more and more constrained to behave as one, that he might not disappoint her. Then, too, he secretly regarded it as unbecoming the dignity of a boy not to protect any girl, even if she were his sister.

Ruth had been very shy in making Nora's acquaintance; but after a candy-pull in the cobbler's kitchen she often ran over to the little dwelling up-stairs. There was nothing she liked better than to play house at Nora's. It was more fun than to have Nora come to her nursery, where it was all make-believe, while at Nora's they really, truly kept house and cooked the dinner.

Of course the boys were too big for these girlish doings; besides, they were now too busy

at school, and with their various inventions, to play with girls anyway; though Peter never forgot to call round at the cobbler's every Saturday evening, under the impression that he had better be there to keep the cobbler from yielding to any Saturday night temptation to go out and spend his money.

About this time Peter had sought Bob Lawton's aid, as son of a Common Councilman, in regard to a public idea of his own. He had got up an indignation meeting among the boys concerning the banishment of hand-organs and hurdy-gurdies from certain of the city streets and parks, and had harangued the crowd. Bob had led in cheers, after which a committee of three, Peter, Dick, and Bob, had been appointed to interview the city fathers for permission to have a hurdy-gurdy in a certain park near by.

"What shall we call ourselves?" asked Bob, as they went up in the elevator to the office of the chairman, to whom they were to present their request. "We ought to have our pictures painted just like the Boston boys who went to General Gage when the British officers interfered with the sliding on the Common."

"We're 'Boston boys,' if you want a name," answered Peter. "All we ask is our Bill of Rights. This is the Era of the Child, I heard a man tell my mother last night. We're going in for what belongs to Children!"

"Hand-organs in the streets never shall be taken from city children! not if *I* have any

influence," declared Bob, "and I think I have a little pull!" At the same time he pushed Dick ahead of them into the office; for he fancied the little boy's face and manner, if he spoke first, would gain their cause.

Dick, not knowing that he ought to be frightened, began at once to tell their story. "We don't want the hurdy-gurdy for ourselves," he said; "but we do ask it for the little fellows and the little girls who can't go to dancing-school, but could have lots of fun dancing outdoors, where nobody could see them, out in the park, if you'll please say yes."

"Yes, sir," spoke up Peter; "we boys, who have pianos and flutes at home, and know what fun it is to have music, think that hand-organs and hurdy-gurdies, and all such travelling outdoor music ought to be provided for other children, and be a regular city institution always!"

"And we hope you will please say yes," put in Dick earnestly, "for the little children who have no pianos at home, nothing at all but just street music, and no room to dance only outdoors!"

Bob, who was not much used to public speaking, strengthened these statements by jerks of his head. "It's so!" he said.

"But supposing I did permit a hurdy-gurdy in that park where you want it, would you rich children support it? Would you give money enough? Those poor shavers couldn't give

enough. Could the city rely on you to do it?" asked the chairman, with a twinkle.

"Yes," said Peter, "we would. We're going to get up a show in our dining-room, and sell tickets and make money on purpose for it." Peter knew his mother would permit.

"And we'll send you a complimentary, sir," quickly added Bob.

"Very well," said the gentleman, who was both amused and in a hurry. "I'll give you permission to have a hurdy-gurdy in the Park as long as your money lasts."

And thus it came about that Dick, who secretly aspired to be a theatrical manager at some time in his career, set to work and with the aid of his family dramatized the fairy story of the Frog and the Prince, and that more boys and girls wished to take part than there were parts to be taken. Peter, who at present wished, when he got through school, to become a boss contractor, constructed at one end of the dining-room a stage that did not break down; and when the play was given Mrs. Bell who was prompter, had little to do, for the actors knew their parts quite well. More persons came than the room and the entry and the stairs could hold. The City Father, himself, appeared with his complimentary ticket and his three children for whom he paid full price.

The children cleared twenty dollars, and the hurdy-gurdy was engaged for the coming summer season.

Yet all this took time which rightfully should have been given to school-work and practising, though Dick half excused himself by saying his "son" was doing his practice lessons for him on the piano. Mrs. Bell could not think that Dick was really in earnest. Still the next day, when she heard him improvising, as he often did, weaving together familiar tunes into a tone poem of his own, she wondered if her boy had not meant that his son had set him thinking about keeping to one's daily duty, though one did have large matters on hand. She had not thought it best to crush their public spirit, and she wanted them to persist and succeed in things they undertook. But she also was inclined to believe that both boys would yet tell her they knew they had neglected their studies.

A few days after the theatricals she found at the breakfast table a "note of hand," addressed to her in a composite writing of the two boys. It read:

Boston, April 1.

We jointly and severally promise to pay 'M. D. Bell .20 if we are bad about our lessons more than twice in seven days from date.

Peter Bell.

Dick Bell.

P. S. It is not an April fool.

Then Mrs. Bell knew that Dick had been sorry he had neglected his lessons, and that when he "played on the piano" his regret had come out from his heart into the keys.

Since he had been old enough to reach the keys, before even he could stretch an octave, Dick had loved to pretend to "play on the piano," as he called it. But no one had told him as yet that in music lay his future. For Mrs. Bell believed in doing one's hard work at school before choosing what one would like for the future.

When Peter went up-stairs that night he called his mother to him just as he was going to get ready to go to sleep—for Peter always had to "get ready" to do things. When she came he whispered to her:

"It's a great deal harder to have character in school when you have fifty fellows round all wanting you to do something different, than it is to have it at home."

"That's where the victory comes in, Peter," said she.

"I know it, mama," said Peter. "I have found it out."

These bedtime whispers from her boys were among the most precious things in Mrs. Bell's life.

VII.

THE COBBLER'S WHALE.

THERE was no further talk of wanting to be this or that kind of a man on the part of the Bell boys, or to do this or that for the "public good," after the hurdy-gurdy business had been settled. One full taste of a thing, like the bank, and the rummage store, and the secret society, always satisfied Peter. Both boys buckled their attention on to their school work, and when June ended were ready for their promotion, each skipping a class into the one next ahead.

A long, beautiful summer came as usual between the end of one school year and the beginning of another. Mr. and Mrs. Bell had a summer cottage on a low cliff, overlooking the sea, where the family had been almost ever since Dick could remember. When he began to get old, as he called it, he had pleaded with his mama to let him have a house for himself and his son. "Any kind of a real boy wants a home of his own," he said. So he and Peter had constructed a shanty, at some distance from the cottage, that afforded a place of refuge by day, provided there was not a storm.

It was jolly work building it; but after it was completed Peter soon tired of it, and preferred to play with other boys. To Dick the shanty was an enchanted palace, where his son and he used to "converse" for hours at a time.

It had come to be an annual custom to have a visit from the cobbler's Nora. She made the shanty a more real abode; for then the children cooked many meals on its little stove, always taking care to leave something over from each meal for "Dick's son." Nora felt sure that this person whom she never saw was nobody in the world but the family dog, Punkey.

This summer Mrs. Bell proposed that the cobbler, who was not as strong as usual, should close his shop in town for a month, and come down and take a fisherman's hut close by the beach which fringed the cove, and keep house there with Nora. When she sent to the depot for his trunk, she found he had brought along his cobbler's bench and his kit of tools. She learned from him that Peter had written him that the boys and men for miles around had promised to give him their boots to patch. So much work had his protector engaged that he had no vacation, save as he breathed the salt air and worked in the sunshine!

Before he became a cobbler Nora's father had been on a whaling voyage, and before that he had done sundry other wonderful things. Therefore it was natural to him to spin yarns, and in turn to lazily listen to the fishermen who

were his neighbors, and often disgruntled with him because he didn't appreciate the magnitude of the business they did in porgy oil. To the cobbler their fishing did seem a small affair, in contrast with the number of whales he had speared and the hogsheads of oil he had extracted.

The cove was a favorite visiting-place for herring and other small fish; and the bay was often bright at night, as if lit up with fireflies, when the little rowboats, with shining balls of cotton saturated with kerosene oil and fastened to their prows, went skimming over the water, the men dipping up herring. But the beauty of the scene and the supper of baked beans on the beach after the evening's work was over, could not equal the glory of a single whale-hunt, according to the cobbler.

What, therefore, was the cobbler's gratitude and amazement when, early one morning, there lay stranded on the beach a young whale, cast up by the waters in the storm of the previous night! It was exactly like the whales in the Arctic Ocean, the cobbler assured the boys. Over and over again was the creature measured, and each time the number of gallons of oil that it contained grew greater, until the fishermen became envious of the cobbler's wealth; for as he had first seen it, perhaps the whale did belong to the Bells' city shoemaker! If so, where would the man be likely to cut it up — there on the beach or at the fish-

houses around the cove, to which it could be towed?

The cobbler was not at all sure of his rights. He fancied, secretly, that like the air, the whale might belong to everybody. He seemed inclined to put off the cutting-up which the fishermen were eager to witness, especially as the children had claimed the whale as their chute, and in their bathing-dresses found great fun in sliding up and down his greasy back into the sea. Peter had roped a box onto the creature's head which gave so much steeper a declivity for them to descend that the sliders always ended by turning a somersault at the bottom of the shallow water and coming up again well soused.

Peter, as the cobbler's champion, claimed for him the full ownership of the whale. Dick had much the same feeling as the cobbler's, and was sure the great ocean fish belonged to no one. Ruth and Nora wanted the delightful monster kept forever as a plaything. At last it was agreed that the whale should be towed to the fish-houses and be cut up, and that each man who helped should have an equal share in the oil.

"Do it to-night — there's a big blow coming!" argued one of the fishermen, as soon as the decision had been reached.

"Wait till the tide turns," said the cobbler, "then all come down."

So the fishermen went home, and waited for

the tide. When they came back they found that the whale had gone out to sea.

"It's a mean trick on us of that old land-lubber!" exclaimed the angry men, and cancelled their orders for patching.

The cobbler took their abuse mildly. When Ruth and Nora questioned whether the whale were alive and had swum off, or if he had truly been alive when they had slid down his back, he shook his head. "Who can say!" he remarked.

Peter heard the question and answer. He whistled, and concealed his suspicions, yet secretly he liked the cobbler better than ever.

But because of all the talk the Bell boys felt called upon to guard the old man by day and to sleep in his hut for three nights, lest some of the fishermen, who thought they had been cheated out of a great quantity of whale-oil, should burn down the hut.

However, the whale was soon forgotten and Peter began to find life at the cliff rather dull, and to wish something more would happen.

VIII.

THE SOUNDING-BOARD.

PETER, for some time, had wanted to do something which he never could forget as long as he lived, and could talk about when he became an old man. He felt that all old men should have at least one surprising exploit to relate. Dick would be no use at all to him in such a quest for adventure, as whatever he would suggest would be like make-believe poetry. Luckily, as Peter at once felt, Bob Lawton came to make a visit, and both boys determined that the week should be marked by some exploit that would set the neighborhood ringing with their fame. Dick was not taken into their plans, as Peter was sure his "son" would interfere.

Together Bob and Peter explored the region, but found nothing to do that could be termed remarkable. When Sunday came, it was a day off in their plans, for Mrs. Bell expected them both to go to church.

The meeting-house, as it was called, was an old-fashioned wooden building with galleries, and a high pulpit which had a sounding-board

over it. Many a time, summers before, when Peter was younger than now, when the sexton had been busy in the church on Mondays, had Peter gone up the steep pulpit stairs, and stood under the sounding-board, and peered up into it with a thrilling, glorious fear that it might fall down and he would have to crawl out somehow. The idea always fascinated him, and he had often felt sure that the sounding-board was to play an important part in his life. He remembered this, as he sat in his mother's pew that morning, his eye chancing to fasten on the sounding-board.

Peter was feeling impressed with Bob's attentive manner during the sermon, when suddenly Bob gave him a punch with his elbow. Peter looked about; but as he did not see anything to notice, he concluded Bob meant to say that he had got an idea.

When the people rose during the singing of the last hymn, he saw Bob looking to the right and to the left of the pulpit, as if scanning the distance between it and the sounding-board, and seeming very curious and interested.

But Bob was able to give Mrs. Bell the text and the first head of the sermon when she gathered the children round her in the afternoon; and not until this Sunday hour was over did they find themselves alone together.

"What's up?" asked the boy host.

"Oh! you noticed, did you, that I punched you in the sermon?" said the guest.

"You had an idea, hadn't you?" Peter answered him.

"How many feet," said Bob, "do you calculate it is from the top of the pulpit, where the minister put his sermon, up to the edge of that sounding-board?"

"It must be every bit of six feet. Do you mean to say that you can jump straight up in the air?" Peter had quickly guessed at what Bob was driving.

"No; but if I could get that sounding-board tipped to one side a foot or two, and you boosted me another foot or two, I guess I could get on to the outside of it, and haul you up after me. And then we might have to stay there a week, you know, till we were found. Wouldn't there be a scare! How'll that do?"

Peter whistled low and long. "We'll get onto it somehow! It won't be any real harm if we don't do it on a Sunday. The sexton is such a slow, old, blind man we shall have plenty of chance to-morrow while he's cleaning up. The meeting-house is always open Monday. Probably we shall end by jumping off when we get hungry enough and breaking our legs. Hoorah! we've got it!"

Considering the real peril of their plan, the boys behaved very well. Not even Dick paid any heed when they left the house after breakfast the next morning. They found the meeting-house open as they expected, and the sexton down cellar.

How they got on to the top of the sounding-board was never quite clear to either of the boys afterwards. Peter said it was not so high up after all, and that all he had to do was to jump up from the pulpit-top, catch hold of a jutting corner, pull himself around it and then on top, though he had to jump three times before he caught hold of anything. Bob said he clambered to the narrow window-sill, which was higher up than the pulpit, and then flung himself down, steering his course and trusting to luck, till he caught hold of the top of the sounding-board. At any rate both boys landed safely on it.

And then what?

Why, nothing in particular. They lay on their stomachs sprawling, their arms and legs extended, this seeming the only way to stay on. They were not slipping at all, but felt they must not try to stir. The dust of years seemed to have grown into hard nodules; and these lumps served as a sort of brace to their feet, otherwise it was a matter of simply lying flat and not moving.

It wasn't very interesting to lie flat on a sounding-board, but they remained there some time, thinking hard. Each knew it was impossible for him to go back the way he had come. It would probably be dangerous to jump. They really did not crave to break their legs. The pulpit was in the way of there being any good landing-spot. Both knew the great-

est impossibility of all was to move about a little. Not a word had either spoken. They simply had lain there, and filled their lungs with the ancient dust.

All at once, slowly but surely, each boy felt himself loosening, and down he fell, uninjured, in a heap on the pulpit floor, so that it was a most inglorious moment. They were silent, in their mutual surprise.

The jar of their fall brought up the deaf old sexton. For a moment the cloud of dust that filled the pulpit space benumbed his wits. He was slowly recovering them as the two dusty boys came swiftly down the pulpit stairs. Most unexpectedly he laid hold upon them, and shook them, and then shook them again.

"Now," said he, "go home! go home! I suppose one of you is Peter Bell! I don't know where you've been, but I'd suppose you've been on the sounding-board by the dust, if it was a possible thing! Go home, anyway!"

The exploit got out; but Bob went back to Boston the next week, and Peter soon tired of it, and couldn't see why he ever did such a senseless thing. His mother was ashamed of him, and never in all her life alluded to the adventure, and that fact did a good deal to cure Peter of folly.

IX.

A NEWSPAPER.

VACATION-TIME always brought out the differences between Peter and Dick. Both were fond of outdoor life; but while Peter found in the country an opportunity for adventure, the beauty all around made Dick thoughtful and more inclined than ever to stay by himself. He liked to fancy that by and by he should write a book, and already had planned its dedication to his mother, smiling often to himself at the thought of her happy surprise when she should read the title-page.

He would have liked to keep a journal at full length, but his mother advocated a diary of four lines to a day. There was little satisfaction in such a compressed record of his moods and thoughts. So he took refuge in what he called "storiettes," and had a desk too full of them to be locked. "A storiette," he explained to his mama, was about other people, while a journal was about one's self—and after all it wasn't needed when one had a son to talk with.

"Dicky," she remarked one day, "your 'son' keeps you from going with other boys."

"No, he doesn't, mama — he only keeps me straight with other boys. It's awful, mama, to be a boy without a 'son,' — boys have such difficult times."

"Has Peter a 'son'?" she asked, always wishing to more fully understand her boys.

"I think he has, but Peter doesn't know it," Dicky answered.

"Who is your son, Dicky?" she asked, wishing for Dicky's own idea of him.

"I don't know, mama. He is the best part of me. He is something inside of me. He isn't exactly me, but he is part of me. Didn't you have a 'son' when you were a little girl?"

Mrs. Bell's face saddened, as she thought how much easier it would have been for her in her childhood if she had had the same sense of a presence within her, helping her, understanding her, restraining her, guiding her, which made Dicky the dearest, bravest, sunniest, little fellow she had ever known.

"Don't get blue, mama," he said putting his arm round her, seeming to know she felt sad. "I want to tell you about a plan I've made. It isn't a big thing like Peter's plans — mine is a small thing. I want you to start a family newspaper, be editor, and let Ruth and me write leading articles — isn't that what they call them? — and have Peter do the head-lines, and everybody else be special correspondents.

Don't look so surprised, mama — you sha'n't if you don't want to, only it will do Ruth's spelling lots of good. She talks well enough for a girl, and she always says something funny when she writes her Christmas thanking-notes — but she spells awfully !”

Unfortunately Ruth came into the room just in time to surmise that the plan was something for her improvement. Consequently she was so opposed to it that it took much coaxing on Dick's part to persuade her to have a part in it. When she did consent, she wanted to begin right off. Mrs. Bell listened as the two children talked. “You don't mean to print it, do you?” she asked.

“Oh no, mama!” answered Dick. “We'll have it on ruled note-paper so the lines will keep us straight. It will be written privately, not published; and it need not come out every week, only when we feel like it, and Peter's got ready a column of jokes. I've enough note-paper to start with.”

“Then do start,” cried Ruth, “instead of talking! You tell us what to say first, mama!”

“What are you going to call the paper?” Mrs. Bell inquired.

“Oh, mama!” cried Ruth again, “don't go to work in that regular manner, just like having a place for everything and everything in its place! You just give us something to write about.”

“Well,” Mrs. Bell replied, “you each write a story about different kinds of children, and we'll have them as starters.”

Ruth and Dick looked doubtful; but they hastened to get the paper, and ruled two or three sheets in halves, so as to make double columns, and after much sharpening of pencils, really began to write. Ruth had to jump up several times to look out of the window to see how to spell, she said; yet the more she wrote, the less she started up, till finally she shouted, "Mine's done — want to hear it?"

Her mother nodded. Dick looked up, much as if he had been dreaming.

"Well, it's all about two boys, two kinds as you said, only both were — I mustn't tell you beforehand. I'll just read it."

Ruth called her story, "Two Kinds of the Same Kind of Boy."

"Once upon a time there were two don't-care kind of boys. Only they were different. One of them was named Charlie, and he liked to play jumping over the railroad tracks. The men told him not to; and he said 'Who cares? I don't care, I'm going to do it again!' And he jumped, and the engine came along before he knew it, and when he did know it, he was hurt very bad.

"The other boy's name was John, and he never had any real feet; and he said, 'I don't care, I'm going to be a boy just the same!' And he did, and went to college and got along first-rate just because he didn't care much because he hadn't much feet."

Peter, unnoticed by the children, had stopped

by the window to see what was happening. He clapped as Ruth ended; but he took away the charm of his applause, by saying, "Ruth knew who those two don't-care boys were. She couldn't have made up the story. You didn't have to look far to find them, did you, now?"

Mrs. Bell thought best not to notice Ruth's red cheeks and Peter's lack of tact. "Now let us have Dick's story," she said.

"Mine isn't very long, it wouldn't come," said Dick. "It's about what you told us, mama — wanting to do things when we don't want to, and I made it up this way:

"‘Ought’ is a short word for all these words, I-don't-want-to-but-I-must-because-it-is-right; and ‘want’ is a short word for ‘I-like-to-do-it-because-it-is-good-fun.’ Then I make a compound of these words, ought-want, and it is — well, no matter. That's all," concluded Dick, turning away.

"That isn't fair!" exclaimed Peter. "You've got to finish."

"I'll show it to mama; I can't to any one else," said Dick, and his face took on that far-away look which always obliged Peter to whistle.

Mrs. Bell drew Dick to her and read, "It is my son's name." She glanced at him, and mother and boy understood each other. But to hide what they both felt, she proposed that Peter should be editor-in-chief of the family paper, and manage its business.

"I can't, mama," Peter objected. "It isn't that I don't know how, but I'm too busy; you know we go back to town soon, and I've got a lot of things to finish first. Besides, family papers don't amount to much; there isn't any money in them. It's just like Dick to get up an idea that hasn't much fun or much money in it."

"I told mama in the beginning that it wasn't a big idea like yours — and now I don't want to have anything to do with it!" said Dick in a dignified broken-hearted little way.

"Oh, Dicky, I didn't mean anything — I didn't, honor bright!" said Peter, sorry.

"Yes, you did, Peter. But it's no matter."

"It is matter too; I didn't think what I said."

"But you couldn't have said it without thinking it; and it's true, Peter."

In this manner Dicky would pursue the truth; and Peter, sorry, never knew how to end the talk, except by leaving the room.

More than once Dicky, in those early days, went to his mother with the puzzle of what his "son" said, when judging between him and Peter.

"My 'son' says I ought not to be hurt when the truth is spoken, but that Peter ought not to have spoken the truth."

"Your 'son' understands, Dicky," Mrs. Bell would say, smiling down in his grieved, puzzled face; "and if your 'son' understands, it is the same, almost, as though you did too, Dicky."

Then Dicky would smile too, a little. "Anyway," he said this time, "I have forgiven Peter, and forgiven me. Sometimes I can forgive Peter and can't forgive me. Do you understand, mama?"

Mrs. Bell understood very well. She put Dicky's story in her pocket until after lunch, and then she put it in her desk. And then she and Dicky went out to walk on the beach. And there was nothing further ever done about the newspaper.

X.

DOUGHNUTS.

THIS year the unwillingness of the Bell family to move back to town was stronger than usual. Perhaps it was because the children had been older this year than ever before. Certainly Mrs. Bell had had less worry than any other summer lest they would get drowned, or be kidnapped, or break their legs. She had grown young, and Mr. Bell had grown jolly, and Peter and Dick and Ruth had become "more responsible," as the little girl herself termed it.

The cobbler had rented the hut for another season and gone. He had made quite a sum of money, and had lived down the dislike that had fallen on him because of the escape of the whale. Nora he had taken with him.

The Bells were expecting to go within a week, when something occurred which tested the good judgment of both Peter and Dick.

For several days they had felt that the cobbler's hut had an occasional inmate. Yet both were sure the fastenings had not been touched. One morning the truant officer of the county

had been seen searching the woods near their house, and had asked questions. Within two days a story grew from the alleged truancy of a single boy into the rampant doings of a gang of thieves! Still no one had missed anything. The officer had been to the Bells, and got the key of the cobbler's hut, had opened it, and had not found a trace of vagrants.

Peter, however, felt there was "something in the air," and that there was chance for him to become a famous detective, and was not at all ready to go back to town. His mother sternly forbade his prowling round the woods at night — but she had not said anything about being outdoors at dawn.

Now, whatever it was that was outdoors had become mysteriously connected, in Peter's mind, with the disappearance of doughnuts and apple-tarts. If each of the children had eaten three apiece and their elders two, that would have been only thirteen doughnuts and thirteen tarts; yet twenty-five cymbals had been fried, and seventeen tarts baked, for Peter had counted. And if the maid, who always said she never ate dainties, had eaten the rest, she ought to have been sick, and was not.

Dick begged Peter to cease investigations — they would surely lead to something they need not know.

"Don't you want to know the truth?" asked his brother.

"Not just for the sake of knowing. I'd like

to help a fellow who's got into a fix," answered Dick.

"Then you come out with me at three o'clock, sharp, to-morrow morning, and maybe you'll have a chance. I *know* doughnuts are mixed up in it, 'cause Punkey smelt the crumbs somewhere outdoors, and I picked 'em off the end of his nose."

This aroused Dick. He admired Peter's sagacity — it seemed like a detective's — and promised to say nothing, but to be on hand.

It was barely dawn when the boys crept down stairs the next morning, unheard by any of the household, and planted themselves among the bushes around the cobbler's hut. Immediately there was a movement. They scarcely breathed, as low down on the ground they saw a head, shoulders, body, legs of somebody creep from somewhere — and before the form had chance to rise each boy had a hand on its shoulders.

Scared beyond the power of speech, the prisoner fell on his knees; and as the sun rose, lighting up the scene, Peter and Dick beheld the stupid, kind face of weak-minded Billy, a boy they knew well.

"Why, where on earth did you come —?" But even as Peter was asking the question, down he sank out of sight!

Dick, terrified, felt himself going too, and jumped aside, but not losing hold of Billy, who began to grin.

Dick shook him, but would not let him loose.

He must get Peter out before he sank through to the other side of the world. Again he shook Billy, and Billy blubbered forth, "Promise you won't shut me up, and I'll get him for you."

"I promise," said Dick. "Quick now!"

"Then you'll have to let me go, so I can!" begged Billy, twisting to get away.

"No, I sha'n't. I'll hold on to you until you get him. Where is he?"

"I'll have to be let to go down so I can speak to him," insisted Billy.

"No, you tell me and I'll tell him," said Dick, alarmed at the idea of losing sight of the boy for an instant while Peter was lost.

"Well, then, tell him to go right along the path down in there till he comes to the opening where the brook runs into the cove!"

Dick called this out clearly and sharply twice. No one answered. Peter must have sunk out of hearing. Dick thought he would plunge in after him, but he tried in vain to find the spot where his brother had disappeared. Again he shook Billy, a bigger lad than himself, still dragging him along. He knew the poor fellow well, and that to shake him hard was sometimes the only means of getting him to speak.

Billy smiled cunningly as he saw Dick trying to examine the ground among the bushes. But either the utter misery on Dick's face, or the firm grip on his shoulder, appealed to him.

"You say you promise not to tell on me?" he repeated.

"Of course I won't," said Dick, with a tighter clutch of the ragged shoulder.

"You follow me, and we'll get round in 'fore he comes out," said Billy, and started to run as fast as he could, being held. The distance was really but a few feet, as Billy had said; and before he and Dick had had time, after clambering down the bank to the cove, to follow up the brook, they saw Peter crawling on his hands and knees out from the bushes, along the bed of the brook, covered with mud and slime.

"So there is a cave up in that bank somewhere!" exclaimed Dick.

Billy laughed; but Peter threw himself on him, and would have pummeled him if Dick had not pushed him off and held him at bay, with a strength he had not dreamed he possessed. "Let him alone — it's mean to knock him down, Peter, when he told me what to tell you so that you could get out!"

"You didn't tell me anything!" said Peter.

"I did — I told you to follow the path till you came to the brook! And besides he brought me here."

But Peter doubled up his fists.

Then Dick, who had again caught hold of Billy, threw his brother down, and then dumped Billy on the ground and himself between them, holding both fast.

Dick had taken command of affairs, and was going to have fair play.

"Now you, Billy, speak first!" he commanded.

“Will he promise too?”

“Yes,” said Dick, answering for his brother, who was now the most dazed of the three boys.

“Begin!” And again he shook Billy.

“Lem’me go,” cried out Billy.

“Not till you have told us everything — all about the cave Peter has been in, and what you have been about.”

Billy began to whimper. “I hain’t got any home like other fellows, and I can’t stand going to school and doing chores — it most killed me — and I ran away.”

“Well?” urged Dick, bracing him up with another friendly shake.

“I hid in the cave, and Mary Ann kept me. I’ve been there most a week.”

“Our Mary Ann!” shouted both boys.

“She knowed me well,” said Billy, “and she knowed my father ’fore he died; and when she seed me at the circus she axed me my name, and she treated me first-rate ever since.”

“Why don’t you want to go to school?” inquired Peter, whose wrath was subsiding.

“’Cause I be foolish,” said poor Billy. “I ain’t like other boys.”

“How did you know there was a cave?” asked Dick.

Billy was silent till shaken.

“My father told me. He and I staid there when they wanted to ’rest him. He’s dead, and I wish I was dead.”

Then Billy began to cry so piteously, and

his clothes had fallen asunder and showed such a thin bony frame, that Dick put his arms around him, just as if he were a baby, and tried to comfort him.

Peter, who felt it was high time for him to become master of the situation, proposed they should go back and examine the place where he had fallen in. As they went Billy, walking along between, and not trying to escape, said that whenever it was high tide, so that the sea-water flowed up over the bed of the brook where he usually went in, he came round to an opening in the ground up there among the bushes. He told them he had been dreadfully afraid the truant officer would stumble over the spot, and fall down inside, just as Peter had; for when he used that entrance he couldn't always get the turf and stones and dead-wood pulled across just right.

"And supposing he *had* fallen in when you were in there too?" said Peter.

"I'd fit and kept him there. I'd hurt him enough, anyway, to last till I got out."

"And what would you have done about him then?" asked Dick.

"I'd told Mary Ann there was a man in there — she knows how I get in and out — she'd seen to him!"

XI.

DICK'S CHARGE.

As Billy was explaining all this to the two boys — for feeling he was among friends he had grown talkative — Mary Ann was seen coming along with her apron full. In her fright at beholding the boys she dropped the doughnuts, tarts, bread and cheese, which she was carrying, but didn't run.

Her tale was very short. But Peter and Dick gathered that from the very first moment she set her eyes on Billy at the circus, when Mrs. Bell had let her go, she knew he was the son of her old beau who went off and married another girl. But that wasn't Billy's fault; and when she heard the truant officer was after him, she felt lonesome for him and hunted him up, and one night had found him in the woods, and he told her his trouble and where he was going to hide. So she had brought him his food — “only a little mite” — each morning before she began her work.

“Well, the game's up now,” said Peter, and turning upon Billy used more detective language. “You just come along with me!”

Billy instantly made for the opening into the cave.

"It isn't any use — we know now how to get you!" shouted Peter, jerking him back. "One of us will go up the brook, and the other will go down the hole in the bushes. We can get you any time."

Billy knew they could. He trembled so violently that Peter could scarcely believe he was a boy of any kind. Even Mary Ann's word that the truant officer thought Billy had gone off for good, and so had given up the hunt, failed to quiet the poor little fellow.

Only Dick seemed to know how Billy felt. He took off his coat and put it over the boy, and fed him doughnuts, talking to him as if he were sick, yet gently leading him toward the house. Once there, Mary Ann claimed her right to see to his breakfast and to "fix him up generally." So the boys left him in her charge and sought their mother.

"What are you going to do?" she asked when they had both interrupted each other to the end of their story.

Peter was silent. "Mama," said Dick after a pause, that seemed long to all of them, "I want to take him to bring up, just as Peter has the cobbler. You said Mary Ann might stay here this winter to look after the place. Billy will be handy for her; and I'll get it fixed with the truant officer and the school so he'll be all right, and I'll come down Thanksgiving,

Christmas, and Easter, and see how he's getting on, and I'll write him letters all the time. Please, mama, mayn't I?"

"What will your father say?"

"Just what you do — he always does," said Dick, smiling at her. "Now you fix it up with Mary Ann, and I'll fix it up with Billy."

"Dick, you must not say a word to him, or to any one, until your father and I have talked over the matter."

Dick kissed her and went off, sobered by his sudden self-appointed responsibility. Peter was silent. The adventure had ended in a very unsatisfactory way. They had found neither a counterfeiter's den nor a smuggler's cave, not even a hiding thief; there had been no desperate, thrilling struggle; and he was not even to have the excitement of holding Billy prisoner while he sent a letter to the truant officer to come and take him away — thanks to Dick! Peter thought it likely that Dick's "son" had concocted the plan.

Mary Ann settled the affair. She proposed a plan much like Dick's to Mrs. Bell that same morning before Mr. Bell returned — that as there had been some talk of her staying in the country that winter, Billy should stay with her and get enough to eat, and when he felt like it go to school. "You see, ma'am, I knowed his father, so I'm fond of the boy already. He'll have wits enough when he's fed up. I'll be responsible for him."

"Dick wants to be his guardian," observed Mrs. Bell.

"I haven't no objection to that," said Mary Ann. "That needn't stand in the way. Billy likes him — he'll be a help to Billy."

"And Billy will be a help to Dick," thought Mrs. Bell; for she secretly hoped that the practical care of a fellow weaker than himself in every way would tend to lessen Dick's dwelling so much in solitude with his imaginary "son."

Billy knew nothing for some time of these pleasant plans. He was happy in being clean, well-fed, and well-housed, and followed Dick about the place very much in the manner a whipped dog tries to get into favor again with his master. Mr. Bell interviewed the truant officer, and paid the man for whom Billy had worked, a good sum of money for releasing the boy from a bargain in which he had no part. Then Billy was told. And when Billy fairly understood that he was to belong to little Dick Bell, and that nothing could ever be done to him any more without Dick's consent, he had a long fit of sobbing aloud, just from joy.

"You don't seem to like things," said Dick to Peter, after arrangements were finally completed.

"Well, I don't; and I don't seem to have been consulted much. Your Billy will be a responsibility to you, I can tell you that! He isn't a man, like my cobbler. My cobbler knows something himself!"

"It's all your doings, anyway," laughed Dick. "We never should have found him if you had not counted those doughnuts and noticed about the crumbs. You ought to go into the regular detective business, Peter."

"That cave wasn't much, anyway," returned Peter, mollified. "The truant officer, or the town folks, ought to have known about it. Anybody could come and hide there. We were off the track, weren't we, when we thought it was the cobbler's hut?"

The family lingered in the country a few days longer, on Billy's account, "to get him well-settled," Dick said. Many were the charges which Dick gave him, on behavior and education; and these vastly increased the boy's admiration for his guardian.

"You see, Billy, you must learn to write, first of all," said Dick, "so you can tell me how you are getting on, and not oblige me to come down here every fortnight. Travelling is expensive and I've got to save up to keep you in clothes."

Billy sighed. "I've got some money, if you want it bad."

"You?" said Dick. "Where is it?"

Billy winked, then leered, and sat silent, just as he used to do.

Dick seized him, shook him, and the boy spoke.

"I dun'no for *sure*, but I guess it's in the cave. Father said he'd hid it there for me, and

then he died and I couldn't find it, and I dar'n't let on I knew anything."

"Now, that's work for Peter," Dick reflected. "Yes, Peter's got to hunt for that. Peter'll feel better after he bosses that job, whether there's money or not."

An hour from that time Peter, armed with crowbar, candles, ropes, and spades, and followed by the boys, was making his way into the cave from the top.

But they dug here, and dug there, and spied about with their candles, all in vain.

"I heard a geologist tell my father yesterday," remarked Peter, suddenly pausing, dirty and perspiring, "that this cave must once have been a pond, and if it were so there must have been an opening into which the water flowed from above, just as there is down there for the tide water to flow in — another old brook-bed somewhere up here. I'm going to dig right on ahead awhile."

As he dug he seemed to enter. "Put that rope around my waist, so if I get stuck you can pull me out," he commanded Dick and Billy pretty soon.

The rope was quickly secured, and the three boys worked away at a possible opening which proved to be a real one, into a narrow slit, like the rocky bed of an ancient stream. Only Peter's legs and the rope were visible when Dick and Billy heard a shout; "Pull me back, quick! quick! quick!"

Billy and Dick tugged so hard they fell backwards, Peter on top of them.

"Get up, quick, quick!" Peter called. "There's water trickling! I've got it, Billy! Quick! run ahead! follow the bed of the brook out to the cove!"

The boys ran hard, Peter holding a dirty tin box — for not only was the tide coming in, but a tiny stream was dropping into the cave through the hole where Peter had been nearly lost, and where they had just entered a few hours before.

Breathless they gained the beach; and then Peter with much solemnity, handed the box to Billy, saying, "Of course this is yours."

Billy took it, but he had fallen into one of his dazed moods. His face showed he was struggling with memory. "I can't never think just how to get it open. I'll bet I can't!" said he.

"I can!" declared Peter masterfully. "Hand it here!"

The cover was well rusted down. Peter couldn't see a chance to pry it up.

With a crowbar he smashed the box. There was nothing in it except some silver coin and a paper. The paper said where Billy was born and when his mother died. The boys counted the silver — fifty dollars — and handed it over to Billy.

With a gasp poor Billy seemed to come back. He looked triumphant.

“Now you can come every day to see me!” he shouted, pouring the coins into Dick’s lap, dropping them, in a stream, till they rolled off into the sand. “Here’s enough to bring you!”

(But Mr. Bell put Billy’s money in the savings bank.)

Peter was satisfied now, and ready to go home.

XII.

TWO GUARDIANS AND THEIR WARDS.

THE month of October found the Bells settled in their city home. Ruth had had double promotion, and her brothers felt that she reflected honor on the family. Both brothers adored her, though never weary of giving her advice.

Peter was to graduate the next June; so he was studying hard, and trying to decide whether he had better go to a private school and fit for college, or enter the high school and take a business training. His parents had left the decision to him at his request, as he had told them he wished to be responsible for his own career—a man would not like to find fault with his parents in after-years for settling things for him!

But at no time did he forget his cobbler. When Saturday night came, whether it was the evening of the dancing-class or of a game-party, Peter always spent an hour with Nora and her father, taking tea with them, on which occasion he and the old man discussed politics.

“You’ll live to see him governor!” always was the cobbler’s remark to Nora, after Peter had

gone. "Hear what I say and don't ye forget. Peter Bell will be governor of this State and if ye mind yer work perhaps he'll give you a job of cleaning at the State House — but if he does or doesn't, 'taint any matter. You just remember he hauled up your father or he'd have been not fit to take care of the likes of you as I do now. Peter Bell saved me and got me back my good name. We must try and be an honor to him!"

Nora nodded; but she had no idea of becoming a scrubber and cleaner of public buildings. She intended to be a teacher, as both the Bell boys knew.

With no less faithfulness did Dick watch over Billy. He spent many a Saturday with him, and sometimes Sunday. Often he grew discouraged with Billy's disregard for neatness and school lessons. "If he only had a son to help him as I had!" thought Dick.

The more Dick reasoned concerning Billy, the surer he became that a "son" was what the boy needed. Finally, after many struggles with himself, he felt he might help Billy, who at least would never talk of the conversation, and *might* understand.

So one Sunday afternoon, when he and Billy were strolling along the beach, and Billy had confessed he had been "doing naughty," Dick told him about his "son."

"You ain't old enough for a son — I don't believe you!" answered Billy.

"Now look here, Billy," said Dick, "I'm telling you just for your good. I don't know when I began to have a 'son.' When I was a little bit of a boy I used to think he'd come round the corner, and I'd cry 'cause he never did. Of course, as I got big I knew I *didn't* have a real boy for a son. But there's something within me that knows all about me, and when I get stuck what to do, gives me points; and sometimes I still call it my 'son.' It's so, Billy, and you had better believe it."

"Ain't you scared of him?" asked Billy.

"Well, Billy, I might be if I didn't obey him. But when he just won't let me do things, why I don't do them — and then, Billy, both of us are glad."

"Same as when I wanted to punch that truant officer when I saw him round here spying on me yesterday, and didn't. That's my 'son'?" said Billy.

"Just so, Billy. That was *your* son — he kept you from doing that."

"He'd be an awful lot of help to a fellow," said Billy.

"He is; but don't you talk about him — just keep him to yourself. You see, now I've got big, I know that most people have something inside that would like to keep 'em straight, and tries to. I used to call it my 'son' — sometimes I do now, just as I told you."

Both boys stopped, and looked across the water at the setting sun; and, hardly knowing

what he was doing, Dick picked up a stick, and traced the two words, "my son," in the sand, and the waves came up and washed away the letters. But Billy saw Dick put his hand on his heart, as if he had something hidden there, and remembered all his life long the happy look that was on his young guardian's face.

In guarding Dick's secret Billy began to believe in it, and to think out for himself the right and wrong of what he did, until one morning when the truant officer came into school he brought him a chair before his teacher had told him to do so.

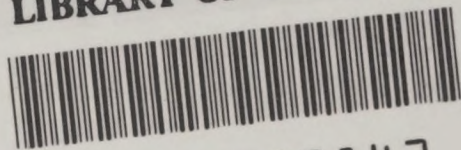
"That chap's coming out all right," observed the officer to the teacher.

"How can it be otherwise," she answered, "when Dick Bell is his friend?"

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